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The Dutch-American Farm

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Book Notices

The Dutch-American Farm, by David Steven Cohen. The American Social Experience Series. New York: New York University Press, 1992. xxi, 240 pp. Illustrations, tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$17.50 paper.

REVIEWED BY FRED W. PETERSON, UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA, MORRIS

This work presents a holistic study of the Dutch-American farm in its cultural and historical context. The author demonstrates that persons who settled the original seventeenth-century Dutch colonies did not assimilate into the dominant Anglo-American culture after the English conquest of 1664 but created a distinct subculture. The variety of northwestern European groups that settled in New York and New Jersey brought their own ethnic heritages to the colony. Through a process of creative adaptation to conditions in the New World, they created a regional subculture amongst themselves and through interaction with the English.

The author documents the diverse places of origins from which the settlers emigrated. He explains processes of change and adaptation in the architectural traditions and practices that shaped the nature of the Dutch-American house as it evolved from the seventeenth through the nineteenth century. He notes patterns of settlement, land use, and agriculture, describes varieties of family structure, and explains qualities of folklore and folklife, thus characterizing a complex Dutch-American subculture.

This is the first work in a twenty-four volume series, "The American Social Experience Series," that treats material culture. Unfortunately, the publishers produced the book in a format that devalues the material artifacts that provide the basis for the core of the study. Thirty illustrations of houses, barns, and implements are set in a limbo of unnumbered pages. No references to these figures are given in the text. Despite the author's analyses of the material, readers may conclude that the artifacts of this subculture are of incidental importance. Cohen provides essential materials to reconstruct the subculture, but the study requires careful reading, disciplined study of the illustrations, and a concerted effort to hold together all the pieces of a historical narrative that documents and interprets early American diversity.

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